

MY UNCLE'S PASSING: A TIBETAN FUNERAL IN RIG SMON (DAOTANGHE) TOWN,
GSER CHEN (GONGHE) COUNTY, MTSHO LHO (HAINAN) TIBETAN AUTONOMOUS
PREFECTURE, MTSHO SNGON (QINGHAI) PROVINCE, PR CHINA

Sangs rgyas tshe ring སངས་རྒྱལ་ཙེ་རིན། (Sangjiecairang 桑杰才让)*

ABSTRACT

I interviewed Dbang lugs (1937-2019), a herdsman in Rig smon (Daotanghe) Town, Gser chen (Gonghe) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China, at his home in February 2019. When he passed away at home on 12 May 2019, I returned to participate in the funeral activities. These included monks visiting and conducting rituals, and locals chanting *ma Ni* and performing *smjung gnas* 'fasting ritual' done for the deceased with the numbers reported to the deceased's family on the village WeChat group after the funeral.

KEYWORDS

Mtsho sngon (Qinghai), Tibetan funeral, ritual practice, Tibetan gift-giving, A mdo Tibetans

INTRODUCTION

On the afternoon of 12 May 2019, Father (Bsod nams rgya mtsho, b. 1969) phoned while I was eating lunch with a classmate. Father was silent for a moment and then said, "Son, do you have time to come home? Uncle passed away this morning. I'm on my way to D+hIHtsha Monastery¹ to invite some monks to come and chant. We are preparing for the funeral rituals. I hope you make time to visit Aunt (Klu mo rgyal, b. 1945). She's very sad and needs our comfort and support."

"Okay! I'll use my cell phone and buy a ticket online," I replied without hesitation.

"Uncle" refers to Dbang lugs (1936-2019), my paternal grandfather's brother. Locally, people do not say the name of a deceased community member and are especially sensitive to this in their relatives' presence. If someone inadvertently says a dead person's name, they immediately follow with *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM*.²

I bought a train ticket and reached West Station in Xi'an City at two PM, where I rested for about ten minutes until the passengers stood and prepared to board the train. Two attendants stood near the ticket entrance. Machines automatically checked each passenger's ticket and opened the turnstiles. I went to the Number Three carriage and found seat 105, my ticket number. I guessed I was the only Tibetan on the train. Most passengers were soon occupied with their cell phones, which reminded me that I had recorded some elders' accounts of their lives in my home community during the winter holiday from January to February 2019. I checked and found Uncle's story on my cell phone. I took my earphones from my left jacket pocket, attached them to the phone, and began listening:

Haha! What are you going to do with my stories? I don't have any personal stories worth sharing.

*Sangs rgyas tshe ring (Sangjiecairang). 2021. My Uncle's Passing: A Tibetan Funeral in Rig smon (Daotanghe) Town, Gser chen (Gonghe) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 60:195-207.

¹ Founded by Zhwa dmar paN+Di ta dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1852-1912) in 1903, D+hIH tsha Monastery is located northwest of Ba yan (Bayan) Town, Dpa' lung (Hualong) County (Nian and Bai 1993: 53-54). See Smith (2017:171) for a photo.

² A mantra devoted to Avalokiteśvara, the Buddhist deity of compassion par excellence.

My name is Dbang lugs. I'm eighty-three years old, and I'm a herdsman. I was adopted by one of my relatives when I was twelve. My parents had eight sons and a daughter, while my adoptive parents were childless. They were very kind to me. Some of my peers had to herd livestock for wealthy families because they had several siblings and a few livestock. I also herded my new family's livestock every day, but fortunately, I didn't have to work for others. At that time, the Skyid nyin lung tsho ba Inga 'five nomad tribes'¹ were southeast of the Mtsho sngon bo (Qinghai hu; Qinghai Lake) area. Before 1956, these eight villages were part of Skyid nyin lung tsho ba Inga, except for Sog ru. Chu rnga (Qushina) Village was in Ar sti (Niandi) Township Town, Chab cha (Qiabuqia) Town. Chu rnga belonged to Skyid nyin lung tsho ba Inga until 1956. Currently, Skyid nyin lung tsho ba Inga residents annually venerate Blon po gser chen (mountain deity) on the fifteenth day of the sixth lunisolar month.

When I was eighteen (1954), I joined a team of ten people who went to another area to work for the government. Except for two, all the other government workers were from villages in Rig smon Township Town (now Rig smon Town). My community (Ldong dngos) had given me two horses and two pack yaks. Other members said their home communities had also provided their yaks and horses. We reached our destination, collected logs, and moved them by yaks from a forest near the Hang chu² (Huangqing). At that time, I didn't know where I was, but I heard "Hang chu." I later understood that the river was in Dar mtsho (Xinghai) County.

After working there for several days, we met a group of more than 400 people headed to Lha sa (Lasa). We followed them two days later. Unfortunately, we met soldiers and there was conflict. Some people escaped, but most died. We, the survivors, returned to our homeland, although not to our homes. All my home community families were living together in Rig smon Township Town. We didn't go home because the government would have ordered us to work in the fields, make new fields in the winter grassland, and make sod walls for fields. Instead, we went to my home community's summer pasture, where no one lived. We stayed there for almost two years, slaughtering stray yaks for food.

This eventually came to an end when soldiers surrounded us one morning. A month later, we were taken to the Gter len kha (Delingha) County vicinity, where there were more than 2,000 Tibetan and Chinese prisoners. We moved stones and soil to build a big reservoir. I worked there for almost three years and eventually returned home.

My adoptive father and the local township town leader were good friends. Many times, my adoptive father said, "My son was just an eighteen-year-old herdsman and didn't know he was doing anything illegal."

The leader wrote several letters before I was able to return. I never imagined that I could return home. Fortunately, I did, and now I have a lovely family. I spent the rest of my life herding sheep.

When I was twenty-seven, I married Klu mo rgyal (b. 1945). She was ill several times and couldn't give birth, so we adopted Thse ring skyid (b. 1972) from one of my older brothers (Bsod btha). When she was seventeen, she married 'Jigs byed mkhar (b. 1971). They have three children.

My son-in-law went to do business one summer and never returned. Some people said he married a woman in Mgo log (Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture). Some said he was murdered. We don't know where he is or if he is alive.

Seven years later, Tshe ring skyid married a second time. These days she takes care of my wife and me. My grandson, Tshe byams rgyal, went to live in his wife's home in 'Khyam ru (Gahaitan) Village. My granddaughter, 'Brug mo mtsho (b. 1993), is married and lives in her husband's home in G.yon ru (Yuanzhe) Village. My youngest grandson, 'Brug 'bum tshe ring (b. 1996), is already twenty-three, and it's

¹ Later, Skyid nyin lung tsho ba Inga became Rig smon (Daotanghe) Town, Cang shes (Jiangxigou) Township Town, Spre'u nag (Shinaihai) Township Town, Rta nag ma (Heimahe) Township Town, and Mtsho shar lug rgyud rwa ba (Hudong yangchang). Rig smon Township Town had eight villages - Ldong dngos (Dongwei), Phag skor (Heike), Sog ru (Menggu), Dpon skor (Huangke), G.yon ru (Yuanzhe), Rgya ye (Jiayi), Pha yag (Hayihai), and 'Kham ru (Gahaitan).

² A Yellow River tributary.

time for him to marry. I hope he doesn't marry someone in Group One or Group Two of this community because these two groups are descendants of eight brothers. Group Three of our village was part of Phag skor Village until there were conflicts between the groups in Phag skor Village.

Well, to tell the truth, it's time for me to die.

["Are you afraid of death? I fear my death," 'Brug 'bum tshe ring inquired.]

No, I've never been afraid of death because everybody must die, not just me. But I worry you won't know how to conduct funeral rituals after I pass away. Monks do some rituals, but relatives must, for example, cut the deceased person's hair, wash the corpse, carry the corpse, and so on. Well, it doesn't matter to me. I don't need to care after I die, but I'm sure other people will say something bad about my relatives, for example, they can't do things properly with their relative's corpse. I heard my nephew, Tshedbang rgyal (b. 1972), is good with funeral rituals.

As I listened, I tried hard to control my tears.

I reached Zi ling (Xining) City at seven-thirty PM. Public buses had already stopped running, so I got into a taxi with two other passengers going to Gser chen (Gonghe) County. Two hours later, we reached Rig smon Township. I paid thirty RMB to the driver, and the others continued to Gser chen County.

I walked for five minutes to Rig smon (Daotanghe) Town, where Father was waiting. He had arrived a half-hour earlier and had bought many fruits, vegetables, and tea bricks. Father said:

This morning Grandfather and his nephew (Rdo chung b. 1963) met the local *bla ma* (A lags khri ba). 'Brug 'bum tshe ring and 'Brug mo mtsho's husband (Rdo rje rgyal, b. 1989) went to invite four monks from G.yon ru dgon pa¹ (Yuanzhesi). The monks arrived and are now chanting scripture for the deceased. Seven monks will come to the deceased person's home from D+hiH tsha Monastery tomorrow morning. Twenty village members are turning *ma Ni*² wheels in our village's *ma Ni khang*.³ Others are cooking, chanting *ma Ni*, and spinning hand *ma Ni* wheels accompanying the deceased. I suggest you take a nap. We will soon go to Uncle's home, and perhaps you may need to chant *ma Ni* or turn a *ma Ni* wheel the whole night.

Forty minutes later, we reached my home, and then we went to Uncle's home. First, I gave 200 RMB to Brug 'bum tshe ring. Then I met Aunt, who was weeping. Her grief upset me, and I said nothing. After calming down, I said, "Please don't be sad. Everybody will eventually die. Don't you remember what Uncle said about death? I think he was glad to have died without suffering."

"Yes, I remember that he often said, 'Human life is as colorful as a rainbow, and human death is as unstable as a rainbow.' Still, it is tough to face reality. We spent more than fifty years together and relied on each other. He was a good partner," reflected Klu mo rgyal.

"Don't be sad! Don't cry! You will not forget your husband. Your sadness will be gone after a while," said Bsod nams rgyal (b. 1939), one of the oldest elders in my home community.

Uncle's home has a living room, a shrine room, and a kitchen. Seven monks were chanting scripture in the shrine room. Several young people were doing the monks' bidding. Some young men and women sat around a small metal stove in the middle of the living room. Some elders sat on a sofa. Everyone was chanting *ma Ni* together. An adobe stove was in the left section of the sleeping room. An adobe bed in the north of the room accounted for one-third of the room. Smoke from an adobe stove passed through a connection to the adobe bed, warming it, and left via a metal chimney going

¹ Founded by Bla ma nor bu in 1831, the monastery is located in G.yon ru (Yuanzhe) Village, Rig smon Town, Gser chen County (Nian and Bai 1993: 213-214). See Smith (2017:108) for a photo.

² *ma Ni* refers to *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM*, a six-syllable mantra devoted to Avalokiteśvara, the Buddhist deity of compassion.

³ A small temple where locals chant scripture together.

directly from the stove to the roof. When the adobe bed did not need to be heated during summer, the stove was not lit. A white curtain enclosed the corpse on the adobe bed. A scripture volume and a lit butter lamp were near the deceased's head. Uncle Tshe dbang rgyal, 'Brug 'bum tshe ring, and Tshe byams rgyal sat nearest the deceased. Other cousins and nephews in the room were chanting *ma Ni*.

According to local custom, relatives sit near the corpse and chant scriptures. If they feel tired and need a nap, they take turns sitting near the corpse. Locals think evil will possess a corpse left alone. Locals believe the deceased's soul can smell *tsha gsur*,¹ which is why it burns for forty-nine days² in the deceased's home.

VISITS, FOOD, AND CHANTING

Villagers visit the bereaved family soon after learning of a death and bring butter, a tea brick, or both as a token of consolation. Some who do not have time to go home may buy margarine and add around thirty to one hundred RMB. Relatives often bring a sheep's stomach of butter and might add 200-500 RMB.

Bsod nams rgya mstho sat at the shrine room door and recorded the gifts in an old notebook. The name of the father of the household presenting the gift was registered, as well as the gift. Gifts were stacked on the floor of the shrine room. Two clan members went to meet Klu mo rgyal and then to the living room to chant. Elders sat to the left on the living room floor. Some younger adult women squatted or knelt on the porch. Everyone was served black tea, bread, *rtsam pa*, and hot rice with butter, baby yams, and sugar.

One of the deceased's younger brothers had married a woman from Dme sngags Village in Mtsho shar lug rgyud rwa ba. His two sons were seated on a carpet on the adobe bed in the living room and served rice with baby yams and sugar, and milk tea. When they asked how the deceased had died, a male elder explained. Next, they went with some younger men to the *ma Ni khang*, spun the *ma Ni* wheel, and gave 100 RMB to each monk before the monks drove back to G.yon ru Monastery.

Villagers chanted *Bzang spyod*,³ *Sgrol ma*,⁴ and *ma Ni* all night. The next morning, another group of seven monks came from D+hIH tsha Monastery and conducted '*Jigs byed kyi dbang*'.⁵ They first made four red *gtor ma*⁶ decorated with butter, four butter lamps, four bowls of barley to support three incense sticks each, four bowls each supporting a lily magnolia, and filled eleven bowls with water.

The text *Thun drug bla ma'i rnam 'byor dang 'jigs byed dpa' bo gcig pa bzhugs so* has two parts (1) *Skyabs 'gro* 'Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels' and (2) '*Jigs byed dpa' gcig pa*'.⁷ The monks chanted *Skyabs 'gro* once. Later, while the seven monks chanted '*Jigs byed dpa' gcig pa* together once, they made offerings four times. Each offering used the same items, but the offering times and the number of bowls of water varied. For example, the first offering was a bowl of water, lily magnolias,

¹ Locally made of *rtsam pa* 'roasted barley flour' mixed with a little butter, it is offered to the deceased for forty-nine days after a death.

² During this time, the deceased is reborn.

³ A short form for *Bzang bo spyod pa'i smon lam 'Aspiration to Good Action'*, a scripture describing the positive actions of many Bodhisattva committed to acting for all beings' benefit (Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2019:23).

⁴ Reciting the mantra related to the feminine bodhisattva, *Sgrol ma 'Tara'*, 'Savior', 'Liberator', who is associated with longevity and compassion (Coma-Santanusana 2020:54).

⁵ An empowerment ritual involving the protective deity, Yamantaka, that the deceased's soul is without fear.

⁶ It is made by mixing *rstam pa*, water, and butter together, creating various images and shapes for ritual use.

⁷ Text related to Yamantaka "a violent aspect of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, who assumes this form to vanquish Yama, the god of death" <https://bit.ly/33AtOKg>, accessed 19 September 2020.

incense, a butter lamp, a bowl of water, and a red *gtor ma*. The second and third offerings were three bowls of water, lily magnolias, incense, a butter lamp, and a red *gtor ma*.

The fourth offering was a red *gtor ma*, a butter lamp, incense, lily magnolias, and three bowls of water. After the seven monks had chanted '*Jigs byed dpa' gcig pa*' six times, there were no additional offerings. They chanted '*Jigs byed dpa' gcig pa*' a total of forty-nine times.

The first offering: (l-r) a bowl of water, lily magnolias, incense, a butter lamp, a bowl of water, and a red *gtor ma*.¹



The second offering: three bowls of water, lily magnolias, incense, a butter lamp, and a red *gtor ma*.



The third offering: three bowls of water, lily magnolias, incense, a butter lamp, and a red *gtor ma*.



The fourth offering: a red *gtor ma*, a butter lamp, incense, lily magnolias, and three bowls of water.



During *Khrus chog*, a purification ritual, monks chanted and lit three butter lamps and placed fragrant smelling substances in a vase with water. Earlier, a Buddha image and scriptures had been placed on a table. Next to these, a small mirror in a plate was positioned so that it reflected these objects. Water was poured over the mirror. Uncle's relatives used this now sacred water to wash his corpse and, at the same time, touched his head three times with three butter lamps.

During *Smon lam*,² the monks prayed that Uncle would have a good next life and that his soul would not be afraid.

The *Sngas mgo bla ma*³ was A lags khri ba, who did not visit Uncle's home. Instead, he chanted in 'Khyam ru dgon'.⁴ Uncle's family gave him 2,000 RMB and a saddle. Klu mo rgyal mentioned that the saddle was the item Uncle most valued.

¹ Grags pa rgya mtsho made the illustrations for this article.

² Scripture is chanted to help the deceased have a favorable next life and to not be afraid.

³ A *bla ma* who helps guide the deceased's soul to the next life.

⁴ Founded by Blo bzang thub bstan 'jigs med rgya mtsho in 1861, 'Khyam ru dgon bkra shis dge 'phel gling is located in Chu rnga Village, Ar sti Township, Chab cha Town (Nian and Bai 1993:211-212). See Smith (2017:111) for a photo.

MOVING THE CORPSE

Thirty-six hours after Uncle's death, Tshe dbang rgyal, Zla ba, and Uncle's grandsons used a towel moistened with *shug chu* 'juniper water' to wipe the corpse gently and tied a good quality *thug khra*¹ around the neck to prevent blood from coming out from the mouth and nose and also to prevent sounds from the mouth and nose while moving the corpse. Next, they wrapped the corpse from head to toe in white cloth but did not cover the top of the head. According to locals, the deceased's soul emerges from the center of the head. A few barley seeds and small tufts of white sheep wool were put in Uncle's palms, and then the palms were fastened together in an attitude of prayer. The legs were tied to the torso with a cloth rope. Uncle then seemed to be squatting with his palms together, praying.

After the monks finished chanting *Khrus chog*, Tshe dbang rgyal and Zla ba put the corpse in a white cloth bag. Tshe dbang rgyal carried the bag and put it on Tshe byams rgyal's lap in the car. Uncle Lcags byams rgyal quickly placed three *tsha tsha*² and a broken sickle where the corpse had been. Uncle Lcags byams rgyal said this was a local custom that he could not explain.

As female relatives lamented, Tshe ring skyid fainted in the yard. Her daughter, 'Brug mo mtsho, and my mother (G.yang rgyal mtsho, b. 1973) carried her into the house. Everyone chanted, dispelling the night's quiet. People could not see each other clearly under the moonlight. Everyone was very sad. It was a hard time. We felt sad when we saw Uncle's photos, his Ge sar³ books, and his old radio.

Thirty-nine men (counting the corpse) went to the crematory in Chab cha Town. After cremation, thirty-eight men returned to the village, demonstrating the rule that an odd number (counting the corpse) should leave and an even number should return.

People preferred to participate in an elder's funeral rather than other funerals in my home community. For example, when an eighty-year-old elder passes away, the death is referred to as *tshe yi 'phen pa rdzogs*.⁴

Children care for aged parents, and if children die before their parents, the parents think they are unlucky, as do other locals. Ideally, parents pass away before their children. Young people usually do not join the funeral of children and adults who have died from illness or accidents because it is considered harmful for young people.

Until about 2005, sky burial was locally practiced⁵ for those who did not die from illness or accidents outside their homes.

Nine cars lined up to drive to the crematory in Chab cha Town. Attention is paid to the zodiac animals. For example, Uncle's zodiac animal was a tiger, so Dpal ldan rgyal and Lha rgyal did not accompany the corpse because their zodiac animal was a monkey, which conflicts with the tiger.

¹ A rope or cord made of black and white wool.

² Small bas-relief images of Buddhas and other sacred entities stamped on clay that sometimes has been mixed with a deceased person's cremation ashes.

³ "Gesar is a folk hero of Eastern Tibet and predominantly known through literature and live performance. He is believed to have lived around the 10th century" (<https://bit.ly/32YNoja>, accessed 6 September 2020).

⁴ A person passed away who was very old.

⁵ Each local community had a local charnel ground where bodies were fed to vultures. However, in 2020, the crematory in Chab cha Town was increasingly used.

Table 1. The Tibetan Astrological Cycle.

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
English	Tiger	Hare	Dragon	Snake	Horse	Sheep	Monkey	Rooster	Dog	Pig	Rat	Cow
Tibetan	stag	yos	'brug	sbrul	rta	lug	sprel	bya	khyi	phag	byi ba	glang
Chinese	hu	tu	long	she	ma	yang	hou	ji	gou	zhu	shu	niu

Locals believe the following pairs conflict: tiger-monkey, hare-rooster, dragon-dog, snake-pig, horse-rat, and sheep-cow. Five animals are between each of these pairs. Locals find this convenient to determine the animals in conflict. Great care is given to those with conflicting animal years when moving a corpse and at weddings.

Everyone in the cars chanted *ma Ni* together all the way to the crematorium, where they arrived about fifty minutes later. Tshe dbang rgyal carried the corpse to a large room. Other escorts chanted *ma Ni* loudly as they walked into the cremation room. Seven monks went to the temple in front of the cremation room, chanting *Smon lam*. Tshe dbang rgyal, 'Brug 'bum tshe ring, and Tshe byams rgyal placed the corpse on a large metal table in front of the cremation stove, ensuring the corpse was on its left side (a female corpse is placed on its right side). The escorts stayed near the cremation oven, loudly chanting *ma Ni* together. Shortly afterward, the official cremation worker (a Tibetan) pushed the big metal drawer into the oven and pressed the button to begin the cremation.

All the females and some males stayed at Uncle's home, chanting until the escorts returned. We waited for about two hours. The Tibetan worker commented, "Some corpses take longer than others to cremate."

After the cremation, a Chinese worker wearing a white mask and thick white gloves smashed and pulverized the incinerated bones with a stone in front of the cremation oven and put the powder in a white cloth bag that was placed in a plastic bag. In my home community, only a stranger crushes the deceased's bones. We paid 100 RMB for this service. Before leaving, we burned all of the Uncle's clothes in a designated area for burning near the crematory yard.

When we returned to Uncle's home, some men heated white stones and black stones in two different yak-dung fires. The escorts first used "black water"¹ to wash their hands above the heated black stones. Milk mixed with water was used to wash their hands above the heated white rocks. All the escorts washed their hands, but the monks did not because they had not touched the corpse while they had chanted at the crematory.

Uncle's family prepared *skar thug*² for the escorts and other villagers and gave each escort ten RMB and a tea brick before they left. Except for relatives, most returned to their homes to chant and performed *smiyung gnas*³ 'ritual fasting' for the deceased.

The next morning, Bsod nams rgya mtsho and 'Brug 'bum tshe ring took some of Uncle's bone ash and scattered it in sacred places such as mountains. Other bone ash was mixed with mud to make *tsha tsha*. Meanwhile, Uncle's family members chanted and did *smiyung gnas*. Male relatives offered a small amount of money to monks in local monasteries and gave candy to students at local government primary schools.

For the next forty-nine days, the male relatives would not shave or cut their hair, while the female relatives would not wash their hair. For that same period, all of Uncle's relatives offered *tsha gsur* in their homes.

¹ Ordinary water.

² A soup made of butter, rice, cheese, raisins, jujubes, sugar, wheat flour, salt, and milk.

³ A time of fasting and intense prayer.

The deceased's male relatives braided a white wool string in their hair until Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year', while young relatives generally did not wear a hat nor style or dye their hair. Also, the deceased's family members would not wear new clothes and not participate in Lnga ba'i sngon¹ or Drug pa'i lab tse,² nor in social activities such as singing and dancing for a year.

One month after the funeral, villagers reported the number of *ma Ni* and *smyung gnas* done for Uncle during that period in the Village WeChat group.

Table 2. Visitor names, village, cash donation, gifts, number of *ma Ni*, and the number of reported *smyung gnas*.

#	Name	Village	RMB	Gift	<i>ma Ni</i>	<i>Smyung gnas</i>
1	Bsod nams rgyal	LD ³	200	a tea brick	10,000	8
2	Lha chen rgyal	LD	300	margarine	20,000	16
3	Mgon po don 'grub	LD	200		20,000	3
4	Lha 'brug rgyal	LD	100	a tea brick	100,000	3
5	Klu byams rgyal	LD	200	a tea brick	10,000	
6	Btsun thar rgyal	LD	100	margarine	200,000	
7	Rig bzang	LD	150		100,000	
8	Khro le	LD	100	margarine	300,000	
9	Mchog'bum rgyal	LD	100	margarine	10,000	
10	Phun tshogs	LD	200	a tea brick	30,000	8
11	Dpal ldan rgyal	LD	300	a tea brick	200,000	8
12	Bsod nams rgya mtsho	LD	500	butter (5kg)	150,000	
13	Tshe dbang rgyal	LD	500	butter (25kg)	2,000,000	16
14	Sangs rgyas tshe ring	LD	200	a tea brick	3,000	
15	Klu byams tshe ring	LD	100	a tea brick	10,000	3
16	Mgo b+he	LD	50	margarine	100,000	1
17	Nor bu	LD	50	a tea brick	10,000	3
18	Klu rgyal byams	LD	100	a tea brick	10,000	1
19	Ban de rgyal	LD	100	margarine	100,000	
20	Zla ba	LD	200	a tea brick	10,000	
21	Dpal mkhar rgyal	LD	100	margarine	1,000	
22	G.yang skyabs rgyal	LD	100	a tea brick	1,0000	
23	Chos b+ho	LD	100	a tea brick	300,000	3

¹ Ritual of offering incense to Blon po gser chen Mountain Deity on the fifteenth day of the fifth month.

² Local annual festival for mountain deities on the fifteenth day of the sixth month.

³ LD = Ldong dngos.

24	Lha chen tshe ring	LD	100	a tea brick	1,000	
25	Rdo ril	LD	100	a tea brick	10,000	
26	Chos grags	LD	50	a tea brick	60,000	4
27	Bden pa	LD	50	a tea brick	40,000	
28	Ri b+ho	LD	100	margarine	7,000	
29	Gser lo	LD	50	a tea brick	100,000	3
30	Rdo rje tshe ring	LD	50	margarine	10,000	
31	Sangs rgyas don 'grub	LD	100	margarine	7,000	
32	'Jigs byed tshe brtan	LD	50	margarine	3,000	
33	'Brug rtse	LD	200	butter (10kg)	1,000	
34	Dbang phyug 'bum	LD	100	butter (5kg)	3,000	
35	Lha rgyal	LD	50	butter (1.5kg)	1,000	
36	Shes rab	LD	100	a tea brick	4,000	
37	Klu kho	LD	300	a tea brick	5,000	1
38	Rdo rje don 'grub	LD	100	margarine	50,000	3
39	Btsun thar rgyal (che)	LD	50	butter (2kg)	3,000	
40	Rdo rje rgyal	LD	200	margarine	100,000	8
41	Dpa' b+ha	LD	50	a tea brick	3,000	
42	Tshe ring bkra shis	LD	50	margarine	20,000	3
43	Rig lo	LD	100	a tea brick	5,000	
44	Sangs rgyas 'bum	LD	100	margarine	4,000	
45	'Phags pa rgyal	LD	300	a tea brick	10,000	
46	Bkra shis	LD	100	margarine	7,000	
47	Tshe ring thar	LD	50	margarine	5000	
48	Mgon po	LD	200	a tea brick	20,000	
49	He pun	LD	100	margarine	1,000	
50	Sangs rgyas skyabs	'Khyam ru	100	a tea brick	1,000	
51	Ye shes	'Khyam ru	200	butter (5kg)	10,000	
52	Stag lha rgyal	LD	300	butter (10kg)	1,000	16
53	Rdo rgyal	Gyon ru	500	butter (30kg)	2,000	8
54	Tshe byams rgyal	'Khyam ru	1,000	margarine	3,000	8
55	Tshe dbang	LD	50	butter (1kg)	35,000	
56	Lcags byams rgyal	LD	500	margarine	200,000	3

CONCLUSION

An elder told me:

A yak-hair bag filled with soil was attached to one side of a gentle yak. The corpse in the white cloth bag was fastened to the other side. The yak pack frame was placed on the yak in a reversed position, which was considered inauspicious at any other time. Once they reached Gnas sa,¹ a small knife was used to carefully cut the cloth rope around the corpse and *thug khra* around the neck. It was considered very inauspicious if the corpse was accidentally cut in the process. The deceased's head was covered with grass, and a sheepskin robe was put on the body. Such close relatives as sons and brothers stayed with the corpse while other escorts returned home. Those with the corpse removed the sheepskin robe the next morning but did not remove the grass on the head. They moved some distance away, observing the corpse and waiting for vultures. The first vulture to come and begin feeding on the corpse was the *bla bya*. Each person has a *bla bya*.

He also told me that those who died from poison, disease, and prolonged illness during which they took a lot of medicine were buried in unmarked graves in Gnas as. Other corpses were disposed of as described above. Sky burial in Gnas sa continued until about 2008. Afterward, corpses were taken to the crematory in Chab cha Town.

REFERENCES

- Coma-Santasusana, Maria. 2020. Releasing Lives on the Grasslands of Amdo: Entanglements of Human and Animal Vitality. *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 55:54-78.
- Nian Zhihai 年治海 and Bai Gengdeng 白更等 (eds). 1993. *Qinghai zangchuan fojiao siyuan mingjian* 青海藏传佛教寺院明鉴 [*The Clear Mirror of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai*]. Lanzhou 兰州: Gansu minzu chubanshe 甘肃人民出版社 [Gansu Nationalities Press].
- Sangs rgyas bkra shis. 2019. "No Receiving Without Giving": A mdo Tibetan stong mchod 'Thousand-Fold Offering' Practices. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 58:14-78.
- Smith, Stewart. 2017. *The Monasteries of Amdo. A Comprehensive Guide to the Monasteries of the Amdo Region of Tibet. Volume 2: Central, West, and North Amdo*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

TIBETAN TERMS

'brug འབྲུག	'jigs byed kyi dbang འཇིགས་བྱེད་ཀྱི་དབང་།
'brug 'bum tshe ring འབྲུག་འབུམ་ཚེ་རིང་།	'jigs byed mkhar འཇིགས་བྱེད་མཁར་།
'brug mo mtsho འབྲུག་མོ་མཚོ།	'jigs byed tshe brtan འཇིགས་བྱེད་ཚེ་བརྟན་།
'brug rtse འབྲུག་རྩེ།	'khyam ru འཁྱམ་རུ།
'jigs byed dpa' gcig pa འཇིགས་བྱེད་དཔ་འགཅིག་པ།	

¹ A place about ten kilometers from my home where my home community members offered corpses to vultures.

'khyam ru dgon bkra shis dge 'phel འཁྱམ་རུ་དགོན་
 བཀྲ་ཤིས་དགེ་འཕེལ།
 'khyam ru dgon pa འཁྱམ་རུ་དགོན་པ།
 'phags pa rgyal འཕགས་པ་རྒྱལ།
 a lags khri ba ཨ་ལགས་ཁྲི་བ།
 a mdo ཨ་མདོ།
 ar sti ཨ་ར་སྟི།
 ba yan བ་ཡན།
 bal gyi tha gu བལ་གྱི་ཐ་གུ།
 ban de rgyal བན་དེ་རྒྱལ།
 bden pa བདེན་པ།
 bkra shis བཀྲ་ཤིས།
 bla bya བླ་མ།
 bla ma བླ་མ།
 bla ma nor bu བླ་མ་ནོར་བུ།
 blo bzang thub bstan 'jigs med rgya mtsho བློ་
 བཟང་ཐུབ་བསྟན་འཇིགས་མེད་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 blon po gser chen བློན་པོ་གསེར་ཆེན།
 bsod nams rgya mtsho བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 bsod nams rgyal བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱལ།
 btsun thar rgyal བཙུན་ཐར་རྒྱལ།
 btsun thar rgyal (che) བཙུན་ཐར་རྒྱལ། ཆེ
 bya བྱ།
 byi ba བྱི་བ།
 bzang bo spyod pa'i smon lam བཟང་པོ་སྟོད་པའི་སྟོན་
 ལམ།
 bzang spyod བཟང་སྟོད།
 cang shes ཅང་ཤེས།
 chab cha ཆབ་ཇ།
 chos b+ho ཆོས་པོ།

chos grags ཆོས་གྲགས།
 chu rnga ཅུ་རྩ།
 d+hIH tsha ཇི་ཅ་
 dar mtsho དར་མཚོ།
 dbang lugs དབང་ལུགས།
 dbang phyug 'bum དབང་ཕྱུག་འབུམ།
 dme sngags དམེ་སྟགས།
 dpa' b+ha དཔ་འ་ཐ།
 dpa' lung དཔ་འ་ལུང།
 dpal ldan rgyal དཔལ་ལྷན་རྒྱལ།
 dpal mkhar rgyal དཔལ་མཁར་རྒྱལ།
 dpon skor དཔོན་སྐོར།
 drug pa'i lab tse ལྷུག་པའི་ལའ་ཙེ།
 g.yang rgyal mtsho གཡང་རྒྱལ་མཚོ།
 g.yang skyabs rgyal གཡང་སྐུབས་རྒྱལ།
 g.yon ru གཡོན་རུ།
 g.yon ru dgon pa གཡོན་རུ་དགོན་པ།
 ge sar གེ་སར།
 glang གླང།
 gnas sa གནས་ས།
 grags pa rgya mtsho གྲགས་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 gser chen གསེར་ཆེན།
 gser lo གསེར་ལོ།
 gter len kha གཏེར་ལེན་ཁ།
 gtor ma གཏོར་མ།
 hang chu ཧང་ཅུ།
 he pun ཧེ་པུན།
 khro le ཁྲོ་ལེ།
 khrus chog ཁྲུས་ཆོག།
 khyi ཁྱི།

klu byams rgyal ལུ་བྱམས་རྒྱལ།
 klu byams tshe ring ལུ་བྱམས་ཚེ་རིང་།
 klu kho ལུ་ཁོ།
 klu mo rgyal ལུ་མོ་རྒྱལ།
 klu rgyal byams ལུ་རྒྱལ་བྱམས།
 lcags byams rgyal ལཱགས་བྱམས་རྒྱལ།
 ldong dngos ལྷོང་དངོས།
 lha 'brug rgyal ལྷ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ།
 lha chen rgyal ལྷ་ཆེན་རྒྱལ།
 lha chen tshe ring ལྷ་ཆེན་ཚེ་རིང་།
 lha rgyal ལྷ་རྒྱལ།
 lha sa ལྷ་ས།
 lnga ba'i sngon ལྷ་བའི་སྟོན།
 lo sar ལོ་སར།
 lug ལུག།
 ma Ni མ་ཏི།
 ma Ni khang མ་ཏི་ཁང།
 mchog 'bum rgyal མཆོག་འབུམ་རྒྱལ།
 mgo b+he མགོ་བེ།
 mgo log མགོ་ལོག།
 mgon po མགོན་པོ།
 mgon po don 'grub མགོན་པོ་དོན་འགྲུབ།
 mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།
 mtsho shar lug rgyud rwa ba མཚོ་ཤར་ལུག་རྒྱུད་རྒྱུ་བ།
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྟོན།
 mtsho sngon po མཚོ་སྟོན་པོ།
 nor bu རོར་བུ།
 oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨོཾ་མ་ཏི་པ་དྲེ་ཧཱུྃ།
 pha yag ཕ་ཡག།
 phag ཕག།

phag skor ཕག་སྐོར།
 phun tshogs ཕུན་ཚོགས།
 rdo chung རོ་ཅུང་།
 rdo rgyal རོ་རྒྱལ།
 rdo ril རོ་རིལ།
 rdo rje don 'grub རོ་རེ་དོན་འགྲུབ།
 rdo rje rgyal རོ་རེ་རྒྱལ།
 rdo rje tshe ring རོ་རེ་ཚེ་རིང་།
 rgya ye རྒྱལ་ཡེ།
 ri b+ho རི་བོ།
 rig bzang རིག་བཟང་།
 rig lo རིག་ལོ།
 rig smon རིག་སྟོན།
 rmog ru རྟོག་རུ།
 rta རྟ།
 rta nag ma རྟ་ནག་མ།
 rtsam pa རུམ་པ།
 sangs rgyas 'bum སངས་རྒྱལ་འབུམ།
 sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱལ་བཀྲ་ཤིས།
 sangs rgyas don 'grub སངས་རྒྱལ་དོན་འགྲུབ།
 sangs rgyas skyabs སངས་རྒྱལ་སྐྱམས།
 sangs rgyas tshe ring སངས་རྒྱལ་ཚེ་རིང་།
 sbrul སྐྱུལ།
 sgrol ma སྐྱོལ་མ།
 shes rab ཤེས་རབ།
 shug chu ཤུག་ཅུ།
 skar thug སྐར་ཐུག།
 skyabs 'gro སྐྱམས་འགོ།
 skyid nyin lung tsho ba lnga སྐྱིད་ཉིན་ལུང་ཚོ་བ་ལ།
 smyung gnas སྐྱུང་གནས།

sngas mgo bla ma སྒ་ས་མགོ་བླ་མ།
 sog ru སོག་རུ།
 spre'u nag སྤྲེའུ་ནག
 sprel སྤྲེ།
 stag སྟག
 stag lha rgyal སྟག་ལྷ་རྒྱལ།
 stong skor སྟོང་སྐོར།
 tshe ring skyid ཚེ་རིང་སྐྱིད།
 thug khra ཐུག་ཁྲ།
 tsha gsur ཚ་གསུར།
 tsha tsha ཚ་ཚ།
 tshe byams rgyal ཚེ་བྱམས་རྒྱལ།
 tshe dbang ཚེ་དབང་།

CHINESE TERMS

Bayan 巴燕
 Daotanghe 倒淌河
 Delingha 德令哈
 Dongwei 东卫
 Gahaitan 尕斯滩
 Gonghe 共和
 Guoluo 果洛
 Hainan 海南
 Hayihai 哈乙亥
 Heike 黑科
 Heimahe 黑马河
 Hualong 化隆
 Huangke 黄科
 Huangqing 黄青
 Huangyuan 湟源
 Hudong yang chang 湖东羊场

tshe dbang rgyal ཚེ་དབང་རྒྱལ།
 tshe ring bkra shis ཚེ་རིང་བཀྲ་ཤིས།
 tshe ring thar ཚེ་རིང་ཐར།
 tshe yi 'phen pa rdzogs ཚེ་ཡི་འཕེན་པ་རྫོགས།
 thun drug bla ma'i rnam 'byor dang 'jigs byed
 dpa' bo gcig pa bzhugs so ཐུན་དུག་བླ་མ་འཕེན་པ་བཟུངས་སོ།
 དང་འཕེན་པ་བྱེད་དཔའ་བོ་གཅིག་པ་བཟུངས་སོ།
 ye shes ཡེ་ཤེས།
 yos ཡོས།
 zhwa dmar paN+Di ta dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya
 mtsho ཞུ་དམར་པ་ཕྱི་ཏ་དག་འདུན་བཟུང་འཕེན་པ་མཆོ།
 zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།
 zla ba ཟླ་བ།

Jiangxigou 江西沟
 Jiayi 甲乙
 Menggu 蒙古
 Niandi 廿地
 Qiabuqia 恰卜恰
 Qianbulusi 千卜录寺
 Qinghai 青海
 Qinghai hu 青海湖
 Qushenna 曲什纳
 Sangjiecairang 桑杰才让
 Shinaihai 石乃亥
 Xinghai 兴海
 Xining 西宁
 Yuanzhe 元者
 Yuanzhesi 元者寺